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Interim Health Advisory to Parents

Date: December 15, 2009
To: Rhode Island Parents
From: Director of Health, David R. Gifford, MD, MPH
Re: Parents: Talking to Your Children about H1N1 flu

Concern over H1N1 flu can make children and parents anxious. Acknowledging some level of concern, without panicking, is appropriate and can result in people taking actions that reduce the risk of illness. While helping to alleviate your own fears, parents should reassure their children that HEALTH and school officials are working hard to ensure that people throughout Rhode Island stay healthy. Children may have questions about what H1N1 flu is and how it spreads. Teaching children positive preventive measures, talking with them about their fears, and giving them a sense of some control over their risk of infection can help reduce anxiety.

Focus on what your child *can do* to decrease the risk of getting H1N1 Influenza:

- Wash hands frequently with soap and water for 20 seconds (long enough for children to sing the "Happy Birthday" song two times). Be sure to set a good example by doing this yourself.
- Cough and sneeze into their elbow, and be sure to set a good example by doing this yourself.
- Teach your child to avoid touching his/her nose, mouth and eyes, as germs spread this way.
- Try to maintain a distance of at least six feet from people who are sick.
- Stay home from school and extracurricular activities if sick, and stay away from sick people until they are fever-free (temperature less than 100.4°F/38°C) for at least 24 hours without the use of fever-reducing medications.
- Get your child vaccinated. Let your children know that the vaccine is safe and talk with them about any fears they may have about getting vaccinated.

Here are some helpful tips on what you can do for your children:

- Keep activities as consistent and normal as possible even if your normal routine changes.
- Ask your children what they have heard about H1N1 flu. Answer questions openly and honestly, at a level they can understand.
- For helpful information on talking tips, see www.nasponline.org/resources/Talking_With_Children_About_Flu_FINAL.pdf.
- Allow your children to express their feelings and concerns. Let them know it is okay to be afraid or mad. Ask questions so you can help them identify and cope with their feelings.
- Children always need to feel safe and loved. When they are uncertain about situations and afraid they may need even more affection and attention.
- Limit exposure to media and adult conversations about novel H1N1 flu. If your children are watching TV, try to watch with them or make sure you are available to answer questions about what they have heard.
- As appropriate, encourage healthy behaviors: eating well, sleeping well, playing outside.
- Use their questions as an opportunity to let them know what they can do to decrease the risk of getting H1N1 flu, as suggested above.

For additional information see:

[H1N1 Flu \(Swine Flu\) and You](#)
[Care of Individuals with Suspected or Confirmed H1N1 \(Swine\) Influenza Virus Infection](#)

Resources:

- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/key_facts.htm
- Rhode Island Department of Health: <http://www.health.ri.gov/news/flu/index.php>
- H1N1 Information Line (M-F 8:30am- 4:30pm) 401-222-8022/ RI Relay 711
- H1N1 email address h1n1@health.ri.gov
- <http://www.flu.gov>